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ABSTRACT

This digest presents recommendations from the U.S. Department of Education's Hispanic Dropout Project for school practices that promote the academic achievement of Hispanic youth, and it supplements the recommendations with examples from case studies. Each Hispanic student should have an adult in the school committed to nurturing the student's personal sense of self-worth and supporting the student's efforts to succeed in school. Schools should be safe and inviting places to learn, and all students should have access to a high-quality, relevant, and interesting curriculum that treats their language and culture as resources. Students should have high-quality and up-to-date resources for an effective education, and schools should replicate effective programs to support Hispanic students. The emphasis should be on prevention of problems, and schools and alternative programs should be well coordinated. Teachers should teach content so that it interests and challenges Hispanic students, and they should involve Hispanic parents and extended families in the education effort. (SLD)

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SCHOOL PRACTICES TO PROMOTE THE ACHIEVEMENT OF HISPANIC STUDENTS

The dropout rate among Hispanic youth is unacceptably high; nearly one in three students fails to graduate from high school. There are a number of reasons why Hispanic students drop out. Many youth attend overcrowded, instructionally inferior, inadequately staffed, and underresourced schools which do not meet their educational needs and are breeding grounds for antisocial activities. Many also live in the most economically distressed areas of the U.S.; they witness their elders' limited employment opportunities; and they experience debilitating stereotyping, prejudice, and social bias. In essence, Hispanic youth do not believe that remaining in school will materially improve their future lives.

To respond to this problem, U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley initiated the Hispanic Dropout Project (HDP). Its goal was to develop a set of specific policy and practice recommendations to improve the education of Hispanic youth and reduce their dropout rate. Over two years, the Project's participants—research scholars, policy analysts, and practitioners—collected information on the school experiences of Hispanic students, on the views about education and schools held by members of the various Hispanic communities, and on the results of relevant research studies.

One commissioned paper, *Transforming Education for Hispanic Youth: Exemplary Practices, Programs, and Schools* (Anne Turnbaugh Lockwood and Walter G. Secada, published by the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, Washington, DC) reviews case studies of replicable exemplary schools and programs and presents HDP's final recommendations drawn from the studies. This digest, based on *Transforming Education for Hispanic Youth*, summarizes HDP's recommendations for school practices and illustrates them with examples from the case studies. Nearly all these recommendations, while specifically oriented to the needs of Hispanic students, can improve the education of all students.

Each Hispanic student should have an adult in the school committed to nurturing a personal sense of self-worth and supporting the student's efforts to succeed in school.

Having such a mentor can help students withstand the peer, economic, and societal pressures that lead to dropping out. The 95 percent Hispanic Lennox Middle School (Lennox, CA) has an "Adopt a Student" component which provides at least a daily hour of one-on-one student-teacher contact and, frequently, out-of-school activities as well. One task of the student's staff partner, as the teacher is called, is ensuring school attendance and securing necessary supports, from tutoring to notebooks. The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, implemented in many schools nationwide to address the high minority youth dropout rate by fostering their achievement, builds students' self-confidence and -esteem by enlisting them to tutor younger children.

Schools (especially high schools) should be safe and inviting places to learn. They should personalize programs and services that succeed with Hispanic students, give them the opportunity to assume positions of leadership and responsibility (to counteract the lure of gangs), target them for prosocial roles, and protect them from intimidation.

Small classes, a lower student-teacher ratio, and schools-within-schools increase the attention each student receives. The goal of Project AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) is to enhance the likelihood of Hispanic students' enrollment in college. At Mar Vista High School (Imperial Beach, CA), one of the project sites, teachers, working as a team, constantly evaluate each student's progress and consider the personal or social problems that may be impeding their success. Students in the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program at La Joya Middle School (TX) who have difficulty focusing on schoolwork and behaving appropriately are given personal attention by the teachers in addition to tutoring assignments. The students are helped to develop a prosocial approach toward school, teachers, and classmates; reduce their anger and build their trust; and overcome their bad attitudes resulting from negative experiences with schools and adults.

All students should have access to a high-quality, relevant, and interesting curriculum that treats their language and culture as resources, conveys high expectations, presents available options for their lives, and demands student investment in learning. Schools should have the high-quality, up-to-date resources necessary for an effective education. They should reconfigure time, space, and staffing patterns to provide students with the supports that they need to achieve.

To promote attention to their future, the eleventh and twelfth graders at Calexico High School (CA) are housed in four academically heterogenous professional career path institutes and have a choice of 15 majors. In addition, having determined that many Limited English Speaking (LEP) students would stay in school if they could take the same courses as English proficient students, the school provides intensive English language development at the same time as it offers four courses in the student's native language or sheltered English.

The Lennox School intersperses English as a Second Language (ESL) students, who themselves have different language competencies, with other students in groups to promote their ability to communicate in different situations. The curriculum features literature by Latino/a American writers, and emphasizes justice, peace, and tolerance. The HOSTS (Helping One Student to Succeed) remedial basic skills tutoring program at the Saucedo Academy (Chicago, IL) has available a wide variety of books to ward off the monotony of drills and to encourage creativity.

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Schools should replicate effective programs, using both new funding and redeployment of existing resources to support them. Schools should monitor the effectiveness of programs, continually trying to improve them or replace them with more reliable strategies.

The Success for All program, in wide use around the country, is a comprehensive schoolwide reform effort designed to transform the entire learning environment to foster student achievement. Lackland City Elementary School (San Antonio, TX), for example, uses the program's *Lee Conmigo* (Read With Me) reading instruction component that was created for schools with Spanish/English bilingual programs.

Another effective replicated program, but one without special instruction for Hispanic students, is the U.S. Department of Education's HOSTS program, which pairs volunteer adult tutors with youth. The tutoring curriculum is based on lesson plans generated from a database that aligns the school's curriculum to local or state standards. The Sparks Elementary School (Pasadena, TX) HOST program includes substantial time for children to read to their tutors since many do not have anyone at home who can listen to them. At the Saucedo Academy, the principal serves as a HOST tutor in order to stay in touch with students.

Cognitively Guided Instruction (CGI) is a replicated early elementary mathematics program that develops students' problem solving skills. While it does not have a built-in bilingual component, CGI has been used effectively in Jefferson Elementary School (Lennox, CA), whose student body is 90 percent Hispanic; students use visuals instead of language for communication, work in small groups using their native language initially, and keep a journal about what they are learning in their native language until able to write in English.

Using Title VII bilingual funding, the Calexico School District created *El Cid*, its own pilot secondary-level bilingual program for older newly-arrived students, but based it on the work of key researchers. Many *El Cid* participants not only graduated from high school but went on to college. The program, which successfully mixes English speakers with non-English speakers, and is team taught by one teacher as an English model and another as a Spanish model, was used as the basis for an elementary education program developed subsequently.

Schools should emphasize the prevention of problems, and be aggressive in responding to early warning signs that a student is disengaging from school.

Calexico High School provides computer-assisted instruction for students identified as at risk for dropping out. Students spend part of the day at one of the four institutes and the rest of the day using the computer to facilitate basic skills development. Teachers make the students' education relevant, tying it to their lives, conflicts, and ideas, in order to retain their interest. Teachers in schools using the Success for All program are given professional development training in early identification of learning problems and appropriate interventions.

Schools and alternative programs should be coordinated.

Students having trouble in school need to be counseled about available alternative programs and schools which would better meet their needs and provide them with an education in a more suitable environment. While serving students identified as having educational or behavioral problems, Aurora High School in the Calexico School District maintains high standards and high-level instruction just as in the district's other schools. However, Aurora also emphasizes personal and social responsibility. Students unable to adjust to Aurora are shifted to the Service Recovery Night School Program, which provides evening classes and daytime community service, until they earn the right to return to the day school. To help change home environments conducive to negative behavior, entering students and their parents are trained together in a program covering gangs, substance abuse, emotional problems, family communication, and discipline.

Teachers should teach content so that it interests and challenges Hispanic students. They should communicate high expectations, respect, and interest; understand the roles of language, race, culture, and gender in schooling; and engage parents and the community in the education of their children. Teachers should receive professional development to promote their ability to develop and use strategies that facilitate student learning and communication with Hispanic families.

Teachers at the Lennox School use instructional conversation and cooperative learning, rather than lecturing, as a way of presenting the curriculum, and encourage lively student exchanges. The Calexico School District, whose students are overwhelmingly Mexican, stresses bilingual competence when hiring teachers and administrators as a way of validating what students learn at home. The district promotes teacher collaboration, team teaching especially. It encourages non-bilingual teachers,who traditionally have a less collaborative approach than bilingual teachers, to attempt new ways of teaching. Also, the district has gradually replaced resistant teachers in order to demonstrate its primary commitment to students.

To build sensitivity to the needs of students with diverse learning needs, the La Joya Middle School (TX) principal works with teachers to counteract the misunderstanding that singling out at-risk students for special services is not rewarding them for low achievement but helping them change in necessary ways. And to encourage an approach to discipline that is helpful rather than alienating, the Lennox School selects teachers who care about and respect students; teachers, for example, talk quietly and privately to a misbehaving student instead of sending him or her to the principal's office for discipline.

Schools should recruit Hispanic parents and extended families into a partnership of equals for educating Hispanic students. Parents should be helped to envision a future for their children and a reasonable means by which to plan for and achieve it. Schools should work to overcome stereotyping that prevents the staff from assuming that parents have an investment in their children's achievement.

The Lennox School works with a core group of parents that uses a peer approach to involve other parents and is sensitive to parents' schedules when planning meetings. The school promotes the goal of graduation from college to keep students focused, and works with parents to help them see its attainability and benefits. This goal also helps inoculate students against the negative social messages their ethnicity provokes.

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